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Writing Russia's Future: Paradigms, Drivers, and Scenarios

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## **Writing Russia's Future: Paradigms, Drivers, and Scenarios**

*Abstract: The development of prediction and forecasting in the social sciences over the past century and more is closely linked with developments in Russia. The Soviet collapse undermined confidence in predictive capabilities, and scenario planning emerged as the dominant future-oriented methodology in area studies, including the study of Russia. Scenarists anticipate multiple futures rather than predicting one. The approach is too rarely critiqued. Building on an account of Russia-related forecasting in the twentieth century, analysis of two decades of scenarios reveals uniform accounts which downplay the insights of experts and of social science theory alike.*

It is commonplace amongst many observers today to note that Russia's richness in natural resources has a key role to play in its future development, but that excessive interference from western powers will prove counter-productive. After all that Russia has been through in recent times, the population as a whole is suspicious of such interference. It is suspicious too of the term 'democracy', associating the word with utter disorder, and will therefore prefer instead stability as essential for the exploitation of the country's underdeveloped resources. So far, so 21<sup>st</sup> century. Except that these forecasts come from two analysts predicting Russia's future almost a hundred years ago, in 1919 (Landfield, 1919, 33; Story, 1919, 85). That such century-old forecasts can be readily transposed to the present day tells us as much about forecasting as it does about Russia, raising questions of the specific versus the general, and of the empirical versus the ideological and cultural as key drivers in shaping the future. Such questions in turn highlight epistemological issues at the heart of social science, touching on its identity as either a positivist and reductive endeavour akin to the natural sciences, or as an enterprise most usefully approached from an interpretivist position, recognising human action as essentially contextual and intuitive.

The relationship between predictive social science and scholarship on the future of Russia is a close one and can be divided into three phases. First, from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, predictions of the future tended to be methodologically unsophisticated and narrative-based. Second, the Cold War saw vast resources and scholarly effort put into developing new predictive approaches in the social sciences, with the aim of forecasting Soviet behaviour. Such approaches were themselves subject to detailed analyses and critiques by scholars such as Daniel Bell and Zbigniew Brzezinski in the 1950s and 1960s (Bell, 1958, 1965; Brzezinski, 1969). Third, from the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union onwards numerous academic and policy-oriented reviews of social science's predictive possibilities emerged from a broad acknowledgement

that the analytical and scholarly community had not foreseen the events of 1989-1991 (Cox, 1998; Lipset & Bence, 1994; Seliktar, 2004). From that time on, scenario analysis has become the dominant approach of future-oriented research in relation to Russia, both in the West and in Russia itself, as well as becoming widely used in relation to other countries, regions, and issues. However, no detailed critique of these scenario-based accounts of Russia's future has yet appeared.

This article seeks to fill that particular lacuna. It sets out the nature of future-oriented scholarship in relation to Russia in the context of broader debates about the predictive possibilities of social science, and provides a critique of scenario-based accounts of Russia's future published in the past two decades. I argue that future-oriented scholarship across the decades has sought to connect drivers with outcomes, using a range of approaches. The focus on 'getting it right' which dominated such analysis during the Cold War, and led to a crisis of predictive confidence at its end, is too simplistic for forecasting the future of complex multi-vectored systems, such as a country or a region, where the connections between drivers and outcomes are almost infinite. Few scholars today claim that social science can provide accurate 'point forecasts' amidst such systemic complexity. The scenario approach instead starts from the premise that getting it right is irrelevant, and that what matters is an awareness of and preparedness for multiple possible outcomes arising from the actions of key drivers. Such an approach has some strengths, but has also resulted in increasingly uniform future-oriented analyses, consisting of a standard range of possibilities so broad as to be of little use to the policy world. The best of the scenario accounts are replete with insights and draw on robust and original research. As with much future-oriented writing, a large element of their value comes from analysis of the present rather than predictions of the future. Scenarios commendably insist on developing clear paths from the present to each possible future; if someone is anticipating state collapse, then identifying the mechanism by which it might happen represents the minimum analytical expectation. However, for all its strengths, the scenario approach as a whole suffers from rigidity of method, an inability to deal effectively with complexity, and a disavowal of the predictive possibilities of its own analysis and of the social sciences more broadly. The standardised framework insisted on by scenario development undermines both the expertise of the scholar and the genuine possibilities which exist for predictive social science. The article concludes with a normative case for the return of single-future forecasts bringing discipline-based theory together with context-aware expertise.

## **Futurology, social science and Russia before the Soviet collapse**

Starting from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, predictive writing in relation to Russian socio-political affairs can be seen to have developed in line with the nascent discipline of political science in particular, and of the social sciences more generally. According to Mark Bevir's survey of political studies from that era to the present day, the dominant form of political analysis at the turn of the twentieth century was straightforward narrative, informed by a developmental, evolutionary historicism (Bevir, 2006, 584-585). The maxim 'history is past politics, politics is present history' adroitly sums up this approach.<sup>1</sup> The view that serious scholars were well advised to stay away from the present, let alone the future, remained common (Cooper & Layard, 2002, 2). When analysts in the field of Russian studies, often those with a foot in both the scholarly and the policy worlds, did nonetheless essay future-oriented writing, such work likewise took a narrative developmental historicist approach (Martin, 1906; *Obsta principiis* pseud., 1878). This was theoretically and methodologically unspecific work, which by today's standards would be deemed lacking in scientific rigour, yet it could still prove immensely astute. Writing in 1906, the German government official, Rudolf Emil Martin, predicted 'that the Russian Empire is slowly but surely approaching a Reign of Terror', and that the years 1904 and 1905 represented 'only a slight foretaste of the things which the Russian Empire will have to face in the future'. Although Martin claimed that his predictions were 'scientifically correct', they are essentially a narrative account of a straightforward continuity-based forecast, which discerned accurately the social, economic, and ethnic reasons behind the 1905 revolution and saw as likely the continuation of such unresolved incompatibilities (Martin, 1906, viii, 304-05).

The Bolshevik revolution of 1917 brought to power in Russia a future-oriented regime *par excellence*, with Soviet Communism's teleological eschatology setting the future workers' utopia as the goal which motivated all present policy. Unsurprisingly then, future-oriented analysis took on an ideological hue. Scholars who were broadly sympathetic to the Soviet regime contributed their forecasts which bought in to the Marxist view of history (for example, Cole, 1941; Schapiro, 1955), dissidents – as dissidents do – begged to differ (Amalrik, 1970; Voinovich, 1987), and émigré writers prepared for the coming collapse of Communism (Il'in, 2008a, 2008b [1948-1954]). Alongside these ideologically normative approaches to the writing of the future, the Cold War also saw vast amounts of money and intellectual effort in the West poured into attempts to discern in a

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<sup>1</sup> Various attributed to the Swiss scholar Johann Bluntschli, and the historians Sir John Seeley and Edward Freeman respectively (Bevir, 2006, 584; Burke, 2001, 3; Hartogensis, 23 May 1927)

more scientific way the course of future events in the Soviet Union. As discussed in more detail later, attempts to develop scientifically rigorous predictions received a great boost during these years, with initiatives such as Project RAND, the Club of Rome, and the Commission on the Year 2000 (Bell, 1965).

Despite such investment in future-oriented research, however, it is now widely accepted that the largely unforeseen Soviet collapse in 1989-1991 stands as the nadir of Western futurology with regard to Russia. As Mark Perry wrote, in his account of the US Central Intelligence Agency in those years, it was extraordinary that although it spent half its budget on Soviet analysis, the CIA did not appear to realise that the Soviet Union was on the verge of radical change (Perry, 1992, 308). Perry's criticism oversimplifies. According to one 1972 survey of Western methodologies in the field of Soviet studies, 'predicting the downfall of the Soviet regime has been a favorite academic pastime in the West for well over half a century. Probably no other regime has ever survived so many prophecies of inevitable catastrophe' (Dziewanowski, 1972, 367). Of course astute analysts foresaw the inevitable generational change in the Soviet leadership in the 1980s, even noting the quiet rise of Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev, and the prospects which this offered for reform (Brown & Kaser, 1982). A number of scholars and analysts had likewise anticipated the long-term decline in and eventual collapse of the Soviet system (Brzezinski, 1969; Collins, 1986; Levin, 1977a, 1977b, 1977c; Todd, 1976). It remains the case though that, definitively by the early 1980s, such predictions lay outside the analytical mainstream; the radical nature of Gorbachev's reforms and the rapid and peaceful collapse of the Soviet system took the expert and scholarly community, taken as a whole, largely by surprise. Such a summary certainly became broadly accepted (Seliktar, 2004), and led to a distinct turn in the study of Russia's future, ushering in the era of the scenario approach, which continues today to dominate future studies of Russia both in the West and in Russia itself. Scenario-based analyses are the focus of the latter half of this paper. Before considering the rise of the scenario, however, let us look in more detail at the survey of future studies set out above, starting with the notion that the Soviet collapse was by and large not predicted.

### **Predicting and not predicting the Soviet collapse**

Before turning to contemporary, scenario-based accounts of Russia's future, my purpose in focusing on the apparent failure of the Russian studies community to predict the collapse of the Soviet Union is twofold, and not primarily concerned with assessing the veracity of that claim, as others have already expertly done (Cox, 1998; Lipset & Bence, 1994; Seliktar, 2004). First, I use the Soviet collapse to exemplify the methodological and epistemological difficulties facing the social scientist when it comes to prediction at the complex and large-scale

level of a particular country or political system. Second, I argue that the notion of a collective predictive failure on the part of the Russian studies community in relation to the Soviet collapse became a totemic paradigm, which has shaped future-oriented research in relation to Russia and beyond ever since. The justification for the almost ubiquitous use of scenario-based futurology in this endeavour since the fall of communism, to which the second half of this paper is devoted, is explicitly based on the apparent failures of the expert community to predict the end of the Cold War and the break up of the Soviet Union.

In post-Soviet accounts of the collective predictive failure of scholars and analysts with regard to the Soviet collapse, a select few names stand out as having correctly foreseen the end of the Soviet system. In this panoply of accurate forecasters can be found scholar (Collins, 1986), dissident (Amalrik, 1980), journalistic commentator (Levin, 1977a, 1977b, 1977c), and even thriller writer (James, 1982). Of these the most prescient is the British newspaper columnist Bernard Levin's uncannily accurate 1977 account, in a series of three articles, of how the Soviet Union would come to an end. Levin explained that he had kept his conclusions to himself for a long time because they seemed 'so heartening, and so strange' (Levin, 1977a). His final predictive assertion bears setting out at length in order to establish its argument and precision. He forecast 'that a new and utterly unprecedented Russian Revolution is coming, in which no shot will be fired' (Levin, 1977b), and that the man who would strike the match to set this revolution burning would rise up through the party ranks – as indeed Mikhail Gorbachev was already doing at that time.

'I do not know his name or what he looks like, but I know he is there. For do you seriously suppose – now we extend the same questions into another area – that Mr Dubcek ... and the other Czech liberationists who led the doomed revolt [of 1968] came up one night like mushrooms, or arrived in a rocket from Outer Space? They came up through the system ... .

And if you tell me that no such figures exist in the Soviet Union, even more completely unknown outside (or for that matter inside) than the Czech heroes were, I shall tell you in return that it simply cannot be so. The odds against such an extraordinary aberration of the human spirit are so preposterously high that the chance can be ignored with impunity. They are there, all right, at this very moment, obeying orders, doing their duty, taking the official line against dissidents not only in public but in private. They do not conspire, they are not in touch with Western intelligence agencies, they commit no sabotage. They are in

every respect model Soviet functionaries. Or rather, in every respect but one, they have admitted the truth about their country to themselves, and have vowed, also to themselves, to do something about it.

That is how it will be done. There will be no gunfire in the streets, no barricades, no general strikes, no hanging of oppressors from lamp-posts, no sacking and burning of government offices, no seizure of radio-stations or mass defections among the military. But one day soon, some new faces will appear in the Politburo – I am sure they have already appeared in municipal and even regional administrative authorities – and gradually, very gradually, other similarly new faces will join them. Until one day they will look at each other and realize that there is no longer any need for concealment of the truth in their hearts. And the match will be lit.

There is nothing romantic or fantastic about this prognosis; it is the most sober extrapolation from known facts, and tested evidence. That, or something like it, *will* happen. *When* it will happen it is neither possible nor useful to guess; but I am sure that it will be in the lifetime of people much older than I ... let us suppose, for neatness' sake, on July 14, 1989' (Levin, 1977b).

Even Levin's reluctantly predictive date – neatness coming from it being the bicentenary of the French revolution - was about right, with the Washington Post on 14 July 1989 reporting that the priority of President Bush's trip to Europe for the bicentennial celebrations was 'economic aid for the nations of Eastern Europe now trying to develop a form of pluralist democracy and market-oriented economy under the benign gaze of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev'.

Fascinating though it may be to identify accurate predictions of Russia's future, the apposite scholarly response is two-fold; scepticism, and methodological enquiry. So far as scepticism is concerned, assessments of broadly correct forecasts require an holistic approach in terms of the field of study and of the forecasts themselves. Writing in the late 1950s, Daniel Bell asserted that more had been written about the Russian revolution and the subsequent forty years of Soviet rule than about any comparable episode in history (Bell, 1958, 327). A decade later Merle Fainsod noted the 'innumerable predictions of [the Soviet Union's] imminent collapse' over the previous half century (Fainsod, 1967). That being the case, then it is statistically unsurprising that a continuum of 'incorrect' to 'correct' predictions exists. As noted above, within the detailed literature explaining the apparent failure of the scholarly community to foresee the Soviet collapse (Cox, 1998; Lipset & Bence, 1994; Seliktar, 2004; The National Interest, 1993), there existed the category of 'some who were right' and had indeed forecast the eventual toppling of the Soviet regime (Lipset & Bence, 1994, 177). However, just because



someone predicted that the regime would collapse, this does not necessarily mean that they were right in a broader sense. Take, for example, Andrei Amalrik's 1970 essay 'Will the Soviet Union Survive until 1984?', cited as an example of one who forecast the end of the Soviet Union. Without undermining Amalrik's astute discussion of declining standards of living and the growth of nationalism, both of which played their part in the failure of the Soviet state, more than half of Amalrik's essay is taken up with detailed discussion of a projected future war between the Soviet Union and China which would be the main driver behind collapse (Amalrik, 1970). He was wrong about that war, but right about the collapse. In the absence of 20:20 foresight, all 'correct' forecasts have elements which are incorrect. Even Levin's remarkably accurate and certain prediction was not *entirely* correct about the absence of bloodshed, defections from the armed forces, strikes, and barricades on the street, albeit that the scale on which these occurred was notably small.

If we can agree that not all of those who 'got it right' in terms of collapse, got everything right, then can we also argue that not all of those who got it wrong, really got it so wrong? I think so. The difficulty with establishing prediction of the Soviet collapse as our marker for success or failure of Cold War forecasts is that it introduces a standard very near to a 'point forecast' (the forecasting of a specific event at a specific time, within a scale of, say, a year or two) into a situation where the subject of the forecast is a complex system. Forecasts concerning the future of an entire country, particularly a country of the size and opacity of the Soviet Union or even contemporary Russia, contain innumerable variables. The narrower and more focused the field of forecast, the fewer variables complicate matters. So, for example, the reliability of forecasts for gas production in a decade from now exceeds that of forecasts of the 'whither Russia?' type over the same period. In the broader debate surrounding the nature of social science, the ability to predict has repeatedly been cited by both interpretivists and positivists as an appropriate test of scientific theory. To the interpretivist, the general inability of theories to offer anything near a reliable 'point forecast' in the complex systems which make up the socio-political sphere demonstrates that human activity cannot be scientifically conceptualised in the same way as the natural world can be (Flyvbjerg, 2001, 39). The positivist response contends that, even in the natural sciences, theory-based prediction does not always require such precision, that probability estimates can suffice to demonstrate theoretical efficacy, and that social scientists have been able to forecast on the basis of theory in this way for many years (Laitin, 2005, 120).

From this perspective, establishing one particular event – the collapse of the Soviet Union – as the qualifying standard for predictions about Russia is problematic. Such a qualifying standard promotes two types of error in

complex systems, namely category and temporal errors. First, the category error. In the 1960s Robert Conquest predicted, with some accuracy, that 'the USSR is a country where the political system is radically and dangerously inappropriate to its social and economic dynamics. This is a formula for change – change which may be sudden and catastrophic' (Conquest, 1966, 37). In assessing the failure of 'most Sovietologists' to foresee the Soviet collapse, Lipset and Bence argue that many dismissed Conquest's prediction because they thought that the Soviet economy was improving (Lipset & Bence, 1994, 177). The argument of these critics represents the sort of category error to be wary of in analysis of forecasts. Conquest made a political forecast, not an economic one. The collapse of the Soviet Union consisted of, by definition, the breaking away of the Union Republics from the control of the Soviet centre. This was primarily a political process, driven by nationalism, the decline of a belief in the imminence of global communism on the part of the Soviet leadership, and a subsequent lack of political legitimacy for the Communist regime. And of course economic decline too played its part in this loss of legitimacy. However, although closely connected, the economy and the polity are not the same thing. Economic performance represents a key variable in politics, but to forecast either economic growth or decline is not, in itself, to forecast political developments. Mark Harrison's detailed account of the Soviet economy at the time of the collapse illustrates this point. Harrison argues that 'the Soviet economy was stable until it collapsed ... The eventual collapse could not have been forecast on the basis of the command economy's intrinsic properties alone'. In other words, criticising forecasts in one category for not predicting events in another category is problematic; 'the first shock to which the Soviet economy was exposed was not economic but political, the dismantling of the command system' (Harrison, 2001, 11).

The second type of error is temporal. Using the same example, the temporal error would consist of mistaking the effects of the Soviet collapse – the dismantling of the command system – for its causes, which were primarily political. Forecasters in complex socio-political systems need to remain particularly alert to these potential errors. Although, as we will see when considering scenario development, it may be relatively straightforward to identify potential key drivers which will shape the future, these drivers interact in complex causal and temporal relationships with a huge number of potential outcomes. A reliable forecast of economic decline can too easily morph into a far less reliable forecast of its political effects, which can in turn be read backwards to imply that what occurred represents the inevitable outcome of the originally identified causal factor.

I have argued that appropriate scepticism in the face of claims of correct and incorrect predictions enables a more holistic assessment of the predictions themselves, facilitates questioning of the criteria by which a forecast can be judged correct, and alerts us to the potential for category and temporal errors. Studying the predictive genre in relation to Russian and Soviet studies before the collapse of the Soviet Union also provides insights into the development of ‘future studies’ during these years. As noted above, predictive essays in relation to Russia in the early decades of the twentieth century tended to be written as narrative analysis, with little in the way of explicit theory and methodology. Re-reading them today, however, it is possible to identify implicit assumptions which would be familiar to later scholars. N.G.O. Pereira’s assessment of how the nineteenth century Russian intelligentsia conceptualised the future argues that the influence of Russian messianism was all but ubiquitous (Pereira, 1979). This focus on cultural and ideological factors represents a common strand in futurological studies, positing that the ideological views of the élite provide a key to future action. In the nineteenth century, such Russian élite conceptions consisted of the view that the future belonged to Russia, to fulfill its messianic role in the world. An 1877 translation of and commentary on the political will of Peter the Great in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office collection illustrates well how such an approach informed British understandings of Russia’s likely ambitions in the world, summed up by Peter’s prediction that Russia which he ‘found a river and left a flood, will become an ocean, and will spread over the continents to fertilize them with its mud’ (Obsta principiis pseud., 1878, 3-4). Whilst some authors of predictive essays in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century perceived the future from above, from the point of view of the elite, others, particularly after the revolutions of 1905 and 1917, set out to forecast from below, from an understanding of social factors. Landfield emphasised the urban-rural split which he argued would fatally undermine the Bolshevik project (Landfield, 1919, 309-10). A further approach focused on the nature of the Russian character, that to understand a country and how it might behave requires an understanding of its people’s mores, motivations, and way of life. Writing at the same time as Landfield, Story based his forecasts around the nature of ‘the true Russian spirit’ and Russia’s ‘great underlying unity of culture’ (Story, 1919, 85-86).

The fundamental approaches to forecasting seen, though not explicitly set out, in these examples represent contextual and intuitive interpretations. Neither grand theory nor the minutiae of methodology play a role. Although forecasting has moved on a good deal in theoretical and methodological terms from a century ago, many predictions since then have been and continue to be made on the basis of analysts’ identification of the key drivers and understanding of how they operate; some remarkably prescient, such as Levin’s forecast of a

peaceful end to the Soviet system brought about by its own leadership, others foreseeing apocalyptic nuclear civil war as the Soviet Union fell apart (Levin, 1977a, 1977b, 1977c; Lourie, 1991, 83). During the Cold War years, however, a far more methodical, and methodologically conscious, approach to forecasting developed too. Daniel Bell's 1958 article, subtitled 'The Prediction of Soviet Behaviour in the Social Sciences', represents a key, but largely forgotten, text in this process of formalising approaches. Bell surveyed the 'new sophistication' of Soviet studies since the end of the Second World War, noting the entry of new disciplines such as anthropology, psychiatry, and sociology, and providing the comprehensive classification of approaches set out in Table One (Bell, 1958, 327-38).

[Table One about here]

In terms of methodological development, Bell comprehensively covers the state of scholarly research in relation to predicting Soviet behaviour (Table One). With hindsight Bell's overview can be seen both as a survey of disciplinary approaches to forecasting Soviet behaviour, and also as a picture of a unified field of study emerging from a range of disciplinary approaches. The process of classification misleads if viewed too rigidly, since in reality an iterative process occurred within the various epistemological communities, as they debated, read, and drew on elements of each other's work. Bell's classificatory system represents the most detailed overview of approaches to the study of the Soviet Union's future in the Cold War years. Later accounts, both during the Cold War and retrospectively after the collapse of the Soviet Union, concluded that a straightforward bifurcation of approaches existed. Dziewanowski dubbed these approaches evolutionist and apocalyptic (Dziewanowski, 1972, 376), to Lipset and Bence they were pluralist and totalitarian (Lipset & Bence, 1994, 180-93), to Seliktar revisionist and totalitarian (Seliktar, 2004, 203), and to McNeill liberal and realist (McNeill, 1998).

Essentially, and necessarily generalising, these two schools of thought represented paradigms which dominated analysis, and were linked to the political views of analysts. Those more to the left of the political spectrum emphasised the faults of the West as well as of the Communist world, focused on the developmental nature of Soviet Communism, and were more likely to posit gradual convergence between the capitalist and communist blocs. Those on the right were more hawkish towards the Soviet Union, majored on the problems of the Communist system alone, and tended to see it as a totalitarian monolith. Although far from uniformly, the scholarly community became increasingly represented in the former camp, with explanations for this including

the arrival of a generation of scholars who, particularly after the radicalisation of the late 1960s, maintained a distaste for capitalism and studied the Soviet system within a broader comparative context than had been common in a more stridently anti-communist earlier era. Increasingly in the 1960s and 1970s, alongside its rise in academia as a whole, sociological, behaviourist, and positivist analysis came to the fore, partly encouraged too no doubt by career-related incentives which meant that using the 'standard language of political science' facilitated publication in that discipline's more prestigious journals (Urban & Fish, 1998, 167). According to Seliktar, 'by the mid-1970s, revisionist scholarship and the pluralistic model had come to virtually monopolize mainstream Sovietology' (Seliktar, 2004, 42-43). In the 1970s and 1980s, to interpret the Soviet Union through the totalitarian paradigm was to mark oneself out in the eyes of critics as an old-school 'cold warrior'. Paradoxically, however, as Lipset and Bence have noted, the new wave of dissident movements in Eastern Europe during this era were attracted precisely by the totalitarian model's insistence on the lack of scope for transformation within the Soviet regime (Lipset & Bence, 1994, 192).

In terms of writing about the future of the Soviet system, the broad conclusion drawn by many observers after the Soviet collapse was that the totalitarian school got it right, and the revisionists got it wrong. There is a basic truth at the heart of such an observation, in that the totalitarian school argued – over several decades – that the Soviet system represented a fundamental threat to the West, that it was incapable of developing (or converging) into a democratic system of any sort, and crucially, that it was incapable of reform without breaking the system. As for the self-examination amongst the scholarly community, the explanations for the failure of the revisionist school to predict the end of the Soviet Union was widely put down to many analysts operating within a paradigm which, focused as it was on how the Soviet system would develop, lacked the imagination to foresee more dramatic possibilities. Peter Rutland talked about scholars engaging in 'group think' which stifled imagination and encouraged a belief in the continuity of the present (Rutland, 1998, 33). Nor was it just – the same volume claimed – a lack of imagination which obscured analysts' view of the future, but also a lack of tools, or more precisely, the use of inappropriate tools. Vladimir Shlapentokh argued that too many Sovietologists applied positivist approaches to their study of the Soviet Union, as if it were a Western democracy – counting, measuring and using data which were both inaccurate and irrelevant, at the same time as failing to ask the bigger and more relevant questions (Shlapentokh, 1998). McNeill similarly praised the 'realist' school, as opposed to the more liberal revisionists, for recognising that the Soviet Union was 'abnormal', and as such unsuited to methodological approaches developed in the West (McNeill, 1998, 68). However, as argued above, an appropriate scepticism in relation to 'correct' predictions enables more nuanced conclusions.

Although the ‘totalitarian school’ was broadly correct about the inability of the Soviet system to reform itself, in that the Soviet Union collapsed, nonetheless the catalyst for collapse was a serious reform effort from within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union of the sort which analysts of the totalitarian school tended to see as impossible. What is more, the collapse when it came was largely peaceful, and acquiesced to by the Communist leadership in a markedly civilised manner. It did not come about through apocalyptic war or revolution, but largely through peaceful protest, constitutional mechanisms, and elections. Such an outcome contained elements of the forecasts of the ‘revisionist school’, which tended to see peaceful convergence between East and West as the most likely scenario. At any rate, it is too simplistic to argue that a failure to see the mechanism of collapse renders entirely specious the vast amount of analysis on the future of the Soviet Union and Russia which came from the revisionist approach. Similarly, when we come on to consideration of scenario analysis, criticism of the methodological limitations of this approach do not equate to the dismissal of much fine analysis within these accounts.

### **Post-Soviet forecasting – the era of scenarios**

The above analysis of predictive writing up to 1991 provides an overview not just of the development of forecasts for the Soviet Union, but also more widely of developments in social science forecasting. The centrality of the Soviet Union’s place in global affairs, and the subsequent intellectual and financial resources devoted to its study, explains this close relationship between predictive social science and scholarship on the future of Russia. In the post-Soviet years, developments in approaches to forecasting have likewise been closely associated with the Russian case because of the academic debate, noted above, which arose following the apparent failure of scholarly forecasting in relation to the end of the Cold War and the Soviet collapse.

This article’s critique of the scenario approach to Russia’s future starts then from a broad acceptance of the scenarists’ own critique of forecasting around the end of the Cold War. First, when assessing most forecasts, a ‘right or wrong’ judgement is overly simplistic. Should predicting the collapse of the Soviet system in a third world war be judged as correct? Only if the sole criterion is predicting the collapse of the Soviet system. The corollary of this is that even if a forecast is wrong in some key element(s), it may be right in other respects. Predictions of, for example, economic decline and its socio-political impact, generally succeeded in identifying a key driver and some likely effects from its predicted development, even if they failed to foresee that the political system would dramatically change as a result of this decline. Second, paradigms can restrict

consideration of the full range of options for the future. The notion that the Soviet Union might cease to exist represented such a departure from the standard developmental continuity forecast that very few analysts were prepared to contemplate it as a possibility. Similarly, ideological convictions – whether of the inevitability of a communist future or of the notion that liberal democracy represents an ‘end of history’ – inhibit consideration of other outcomes. Third, the field of forecast matters. ‘Whither Russia?’ forecasts are of a different type from forecasts on the state of oil and gas production. The former contain a greater number of variables interacting in a more complex system which is more susceptible to enacted changes, those which stem from the less predictable moves of political actors, rather than *crescive* changes, those which follow more autonomous processes – for example, demographic cycles or the removal of oil from the ground (Bell, 1958, 358).

Against the background of the end of the Cold War, such conclusions help to explain the widespread adoption of the scenario approach, which presents multiple scenarios of possible futures, as the methodology of choice for future-oriented analysis from the early 1990s onwards. Where social scientists had been widely criticised for their apparent failure to predict the events of 1989 to 1991, the scenario method allows, indeed mandates, the presentation of a range of futures, from standard developmental continuity to that emblem of scenario analysis, the paradigm-busting notion of ‘thinking the unthinkable’ (Bishop, Hines, & Collins, 2007, 11; Kahn, 1962; Yergin & Gustafson, 1993, 10). Coinciding with the post-modern turn in the humanities and social sciences, scenario development appeared to confirm the idea that just as all-encompassing metanarratives had been brought low to be replaced by a choice of equally valid narratives, so single linear predictions should now be replaced by multiple stories of the future. Notions of ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ predictions have no place in scenario development, which does not offer prediction or forecast but rather details a number of potential paths along which history may travel. Key to the process of scenario development is an acceptance on the part of its advocates that the interaction of a huge number of variables, both enacted and *crescive*, in a complex system renders pointless any attempt at accurate prediction. Instead, scenario development appears to offer the ideal solution for future-oriented analysis; it has a well-regarded pedigree in the business world, where it was pioneered by the Shell oil company in the 1970s, and a developed literature which moves beyond its management roots, and sets out its claims, methodology, constitutive elements, limitations and so on (Cornelius, Van de Putte, & Romani, 2005; Miller, 2007; Ogilvy, 2002, 2011; Ogilvy, Schwartz, & Flower, 2000; Saradzhyan & Abdullaev, 2011; Sellin, 2002; Sylvan, Keller, & Haftel, 2004; Yergin & Gustafson, 1993). Slightly more disingenuously, it has not escaped the attention of a number of observers that scenario analysis also offers scholars more reputational security than other approaches to future-oriented analysis. If one is not

offering a prediction, but rather a range of potential outcomes – what leading scenarist Peter Schwartz calls ‘anticipations’ (Schwartz, 2002, 26) – then one cannot be wrong. Some bluntly argue that this represents ‘something of a cop-out’ on the part of the analysts in question (D. A. Smith, 1997, 2). Advocates of the scenario approach would counter, in accordance with much of the analysis in this paper so far, that a focus on ‘getting it right’ is too simplistic for forecasting the future of complex multi-vectored systems, such as a country or political system, where the interconnections between drivers and outcomes are almost infinite.

The contention of this article, however, is that for all the validity of its critique of Cold War era future-oriented analysis, the scenario approach does not itself represent an appropriate response. It is a combinatory approach which amplifies some of the faults of the previous interpretivist and positivist stances outlined above. To generalise, in the pre-Cold War period a narrative, interpretivist approach saw the future as discernable along broad continuity lines focused on the identification of key drivers. In the Cold War years ideological and positivist approaches alike saw the future as predictable, based on the near certitudes of socio-economic theories. In the post-Cold War years the scenario approach sees the future as multiple, its unpredictability meaning that all feasible outcomes should be anticipated as possible. Scenarists take from the pre-Cold War years the notion of a narrative account, theoretically vague from the social science perspective, and create a series of alternative narratives. At the same time, drawing on the approaches of the Cold War years, they employ a tight methodological framework, albeit not explicitly social scientific, for scenario building.<sup>2</sup> Although the process of developing scenarios can provide a rich seam of research-based holistic analysis, as key drivers are

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<sup>2</sup> In terms of process, scenario planning, in its most comprehensive form more likely to be employed in the business and policy worlds than in scholarly analysis, entails a robust, detailed, research-based, and considered process. A scenario-planning exercise by a company or a government concerned with how to orient its efforts in relation to Russia over the coming decade would be carried out in a number of facilitated stages. A group of key actors responsible for policy in relation to Russia would identify the central problems and key drivers, undertake detailed research, draw up several narratives of the future, and then anticipate appropriate strategies to provide an effective way forward in the light of the possible scenarios (Ogilvy, 2002, 176) Scholarly use of the scenario approach tends to be less normative and to be written by those more likely to be observers of the Russian scene, than participants in the worlds of policy and business. Absent the specific setting of the business or policy worlds, academic scenarists tend to the development of a limited number of scenarios without the need for a normative, problem-based response.



identified and their development and interaction analysed, the scenarios themselves are more problematic. Having acknowledged the complexity of interaction between a range of key drivers and actors across time, scenario analysis then develops a limited number of narrative-based accounts of the future, assigning particular developments in key drivers to particular scenarios in a methodologically vague manner. However rich the underlying analysis, in scenario-based accounts of Russia's future it is reduced to a standard set of three or four futures – usually along the lines of best case, worst case, continuity, and regional variation (Figure One) – within a framework which habitually disavows probability estimates. The latter part of this article analyses 13 separate scenario-based approaches to Russia's future, written between 1993 and 2011 (see Appendix One).

### **Scenarios of Russia's Future – the key elements**

Having set out an explanation of the scenario approach and its popularity in the post-Soviet era, I turn now to a more detailed analysis of scenarios for Russia in the past two decades. This analysis considers the identification of key drivers, which change over time since they tend to be tied closely to issues current at the time of the scenarios' development. It sets out too the variety of styles in which scenarios are written, noting in particular the difficulty of reconciling the precision of fictional 'histories from the future' or of probability estimates, with the notion that prediction is neither possible nor the aim of scenario-based accounts. Finally, it returns to the question of how future-oriented research on Russia fits into broader social science accounts of the future. Before developing such analysis though, I provide a typology of scenarios for Russia, to illustrate the contention that far from providing a diverse range of possible futures and liberating forecasters from the 'security blanket of the single forecast' (Yergin & Gustafson, 1993, 12), scenario-based accounts of Russia's future provide a predictable set of alternatives of so all-encompassing a nature as to undermine their functionality for policy makers.

Figure One plots the scenarios developed in the books and articles under discussion here (see Appendix One) in terms of the directions they have anticipated for Russia. The scenarios in each of these 13 accounts written over the past two decades can be placed within the framework of continuity, best case, worst case, and a regional variant. The nature of the scenario process is that it mandates the development of multiple futures. Having adopted the scenario approach as the best way to write about Russia's future, analysts are therefore bound to consider alternative outcomes, and so each account, with only slight variations, sets out paths to continuity, modernisation and democratisation, authoritarian relapse, and, more prevalent in the 1990s, disintegration along regional lines. The advantage of this process lies in the analysis of what may lie along each of these paths to the

future. It is of interest to note how depictions of and designations for each of these directions has developed since the Soviet collapse, from the broad hopes and fears built on the comparative *tabula rasa* of the early 1990s, through to the more specific and limited options available against the background of an established regime today. However, the mandatory multiplicity of futures has a number of disadvantages – let alone the methodological weaknesses discussed below. Requiring a variety of futures creates an inescapable logic whereby each scenario-based account must contain each variant. Scenarists may start from the premise that the future is unpredictable, but their approach creates a predictable set of options accompanied by a methodological bias against preferring one future over another and a loss of deductive force, since each case is argued out equally.

**Figure One. Scenario Types: Russia (from publications using the scenario approach, 1993-2011)**

[Figure One about here]

Appendix One lists scenario-based accounts of Russia's future written in the past two decades, and sets out the key drivers of developments identified by their authors. As with the scenarios in Figure One, listing these key drivers represents a useful exercise in itself, providing a fascinating overview of changes and continuity with regard to those domestic issues of most concern to Russia-watchers in the past two decades. With the occasional exception, these are very much of their time. Considering the political arena, for example, key drivers in the 1990s tended to reflect political uncertainty. Will democracy and democratic institutions bed down? What factors will likely affect this process? By the Putin years, the key political drivers reflect potential pathways forward in terms of the stability or otherwise of the Putin regime. Such questions as the management of presidential successions, the role of the *siloviki*, and the rule of law come to the fore, along with attempts to find potential routes by which the stability of the regime might be undermined. The methodology demands that a full range of scenarios for the Putin regime must include continuity, democratisation, and the growth of authoritarianism, and so the potential for temporal error looms large in the sense of 'reading back' to identify those drivers likely to have happened in order to arrive at each possible outcome. As with the political factors set out in Appendix One, so the socio-economic and security drivers reflect both the time the scenarios were developed and the range of possibilities that the scenario method requires. In the 1990s social unrest, unemployment, a disaffected military, the creation of a market system and control of the regions were all seen as key. By the 2000s, oil prices, the mood of the middle classes, corruption, modernisation, demography and terrorism dominate the lists of drivers.

Having arrived at their set of key drivers, scenarists then proceed to develop a limited number of potential scenarios, typically between three and six, which depend on their behaviour. From the perspective of a user-community – business, government, and so on – the development of multiple accounts, as opposed to one account, seems not to be as advantageous as proponents of the scenario process assert. Joseph Stanislaw states that Yergin and Gustafson's *Russia 2010* 'provides us with the signposts for the future and decreases the likelihood that we will be surprised by the direction of events' (1993, xviii). Such may be the case in terms of each scenario illustrating the process by which a certain outcome may come about. However, since all potential outcomes are covered, the extent to which scenarios offer a signpost of value to user communities anticipating future events is diminished. A single, rather than multiple, anticipation of the future will rarely set itself up as being entirely definitive and will almost never be perceived as such by its interlocutors. In this way it provides the basis for further development and discussion. As Figure One illustrates, however, the output of the scenario process tends to be a set of potential futures that contains most possibilities (best case, worst case, continuity, and regionalism), and hence reduces the scope for external criticism and engagement at the same time as providing little guidance as to the potentiality of outcomes. The experts engaged in scenario development may well consider one outcome likely and another highly unlikely, but are constrained from saying so by the premise of the scenario approach that gives validity to all accounts lest the eventual outcome be missed. The alleged failure to predict the Soviet collapse still looms large over the world of futures research in that the need to avoid paradigmatic boundaries on conceptualisations of the future has itself become a paradigm, placing limitations on the identification of the likely or more probable outcome.

There are clear methodological difficulties with the scenario approach. Social scientists know well enough the difficulty in establishing causal links in complex systems even when dealing with definite outcomes. To attempt the same with a number of imagined outcomes complicates the problem beyond solving. The output of scenario development is usually presented in a narrative style; regularly – and in accordance with established scenario methodology (Ogilvy et al., 2000) – such narratives take the form of imagined histories, written as if from the perspective of several years hence (Sakwa in Galeotti & Synge, 2001; Kuusi, Smith, & Tihonen, 2007; Saradzhyan & Abdullaev, 2011; Yergin & Gustafson, 1993). These imagined histories are not of course meant to be taken, in their detailed form, as forecasts, but rather as illustrative possibilities. Nonetheless, they demonstrate the difficulty which scenario development has, in that they represent distinct, simplified 'types', or, as Seppo Remes has it, 'reductions that will never as such become reality' (Kuusi et al., 2007, 81). This stage of the scenario process proves particularly problematic. Taking a highly complex system (in this case, Russia) on

the basis of a number of themselves complex drivers (for example, governmental performance, the development of a market system, ethnic tension) with an almost infinite number of causal links between them, scenarists develop a small number of relatively simple scenarios. The assumptions or suppositions involved in the process of reduction are legion, and again can be seen to draw on both the interpretivist and the positivist approaches.

The interpretivist approach depends on the expertise, judgement, and preferred paradigm of the scenarist, rather than on any particular discipline-based stance, such as those developed in the Cold War (Table One). In the context of the development of forecasting set out in this paper then, this approach can be seen as a return to the pre-Cold War, theoretically and methodologically unspecific, expert-centric, narrative account, but with one fundamental disadvantage – namely that instead of an expert setting out one interpretive account of the future, the scenario method demands that several distinctively different accounts be provided, thereby undermining the very expert judgement central to such an approach. Trying to fit expert judgement to the fixed framework of scenarios presents an unnecessary and obfuscatory task. For example, Saradzhyan and Abdullaev's account of *Alternative Futures for Russia* (2011) uncontroversially posited the identity of Russia's president after May 2012 as a key driver and had three scenarios – Putin returning, Medvedev remaining, and a 'President X'. The third scenario, 'President X', involved a military man or hard-line *silovik* taking power. The argument here is not so much concerned with whether such a turn appeared likely or not, but rather with the methodological process by which the notion that a President X be chosen becomes tied into a hard-line, worst-case scenario (of the sort found, as Figure One illustrates, in all scenario-based accounts of Russia's future). In the interpretivist approach, that process is entirely subjective, based on the judgement of the analysts, since different analysts could as convincingly have had President X being a semi-reformer in the Medvedev mould. Indeed, it is notable that a number of western scenario accounts find the positive scenario the most difficult to write, often couching it in terms of Russia being forced into democratisation or marketisation against its will due to the failure of preferred statist and authoritarian options (Galeotti & Synge, 2001, 109). A recent survey by Russian scholars of western predictions about Russia, concluded, with unscholarly overstatement but a soupcon of truth, that such predictions see Russia as on a path back to totalitarianism (Nosov, 2008, 8).

Contrary to its intention, the scenario approach leaves little room for fluidity, and the complexity acknowledged in the process of identifying drivers becomes oversimplified in the construction of the narrative scenario. Expert analysis can be undermined by the process of scenario selection – for example, Andrew Kuchins' astute anticipation in 2007 of the coming fall of Mayor Luzhkov and the extension of the presidential term suffers

from being placed in a scenario involving the end of the Putin regime (2007, 19, 26). Furthermore, the fictionalised detail of a scenario narrative can tempt experts into over-reliance on contemporary but fleeting personalities and phenomena, such as Yergin and Gustafson's use of Valerii Neverov – the now largely forgotten founder of the Hermes oil company in the early 1990s – as their example of a successful Russian-style businessman in 2010.

The positivist approach to the development of scenarios from an established set of key drivers appears more robust than the interpretivist, as it seeks to plot in detail how the interaction of drivers leads to particular scenarios and to show how certain behaviour in driver X makes scenario Y more likely. For example, in 2005 a team of Russian academics developed three standard scenarios (apocalyptic, Putinist, democratic) for Russia three years from then, and indicated the top five events required for each scenario to develop (Satarov, Blagoveshchenskii, & Blagoveshchenskii, 2005). A group of Finnish experts essayed an alternative scenarist methodology for Russia 2030, consisting of scenarios dependent on two factors (modernisation of the economy and socio-political development) with three options for each (for the economy, modernisation, partial renewal, corruption and decline; for the socio-political sector, law-based, weaker central power but non-functioning state-directed contractual society, and authoritarian). Both the Russian and the Finnish schema appear to provide a more objective approach than does subjective interpretivism. However, the notion that such causal links can be easily made between the behaviour of a range of disparate drivers and subsequent scenarios has little basis in social science theory. Behind the carefully constructed 'if-then' hypotheses lie little more than the same subjective suppositions. As noted earlier, the notion that so wide a range of drivers can systematically be linked to a multiplicity of possible outcomes overstretches the bounds on the validity of causal generalisations. Indeed, where similar attempts at using 'if-then' causal links have been made in scenario development away from Russia – in a computer-based analysis of the Israeli-Palestine conflict – a post-hoc assessment found many of these links to be 'faulty' (Sylvan et al., 2004).

## **Conclusion**

Future-oriented scholarship across the decades has sought to connect drivers with outcomes, using a range of approaches. Early narrative accounts relied on the identification of the key drivers and their extrapolation into the future according to an interpretivist perspective, an ideological paradigm, or some combination of the two. During the Cold War, the positivist turn in the social sciences, accompanied by huge investment in Soviet

studies in the United States in particular, saw a range of academic disciplines put to the service of forecasting developments in the Soviet Union. The perception, exaggerated but not entirely misplaced, that such approaches failed to foresee the most fundamental of developments in relation to the Soviet system – namely, its collapse – led to a crisis of confidence in relation to forecasting. Scenario planning became an attractive alternative, embracing the shift to postmodernism in the social sciences, with its preference for multiple narratives, and ostensibly removing the forecasting element from its anticipations of the future. Both the interpretivist and positivist approaches to scenario development from key drivers maintain a commitment to the central dictum of scenarists – namely that they are not offering predictions, but rather anticipating alternative futures. To some extent such a stance holds true, though with the occasional lapse where forecasts are made, or where one scenario out of several is lauded post-hoc as if it were a prediction rather than simply one of several potential futures (Cornelius et al., 2005, 94, 98; Kuchins, 2007, 26).

There is clearly merit in considering possible paths of development, and as this article has repeatedly emphasised, the analytical process of scenario development results in a good deal of useful and high quality research on contemporary Russia. In addition, the process of working out how each of several broad outcomes might come about provides a laudable emphasis on the mechanisms of political change. However, as an exercise in looking to the future, the scenario approach re-creates many of the problems it was designed to solve. If analysts of the Cold War era, imprisoned in paradigms, failed to ‘think the unthinkable’ and foresee the collapse of the Soviet Union, then the scenario approach counter-intuitively creates a new paradigm, that all outcomes are to be given equal credence and nothing is unthinkable. In this way, as Figure One illustrates, most scenario-based accounts of Russia’s future now include an outcome in which the state collapses, however unlikely that may be. The very mandating of every possibility removes the power from a genuine prediction of state failure. Right or wrong, the single forecasts of Levin or Amalrik in the 1970s and 1980s had sufficient impact to create debate and deeper analysis; had they been employing the scenario method, the force inherent in an unexpected outlying prediction would have been subsumed within a collection of contradictory futures and their forecasts would have passed by unremarked. Again, the counter-intuitive but convincing conclusion is that having set out, from the perspective of the largely unforeseen Soviet collapse, to make ‘the unthinkable’ a valid construct in future-oriented analysis, the scenarists have succeeded in making the unthinkable a compulsory commonplace, just as easily passed over as if it were not there.

This article functions primarily as an overview of future-oriented research in relation to Russia, and offers a specific critique of the scenario approach. Its scope and area focus means that it is not the place for developing an alternative approach to and direction for ‘future studies’ more broadly. What seems clear though is that, however ill-advised it may seem for scholars to engage in the art of predicting or anticipating coming events, the expectation that we will do so – and area-focused experts in particular will do so – and furthermore do so effectively, remains strong on the part of the policy world, businesses, and the general public. The social science community has itself long set great store in developing appropriate techniques for such analysis. Although scenario development has its place as a facilitated, quasi game-theoretical process followed in-house within a community of policy or business actors with a problem-based focus, its use by published scholars and analysts has been less appropriate. My preference is for a return to more focused, and more compelling, single-future accounts, clearly located within knowledge of both country and discipline. I have argued elsewhere recently ([author omitted for sake of anonymous refereeing process] *Political Studies*) for an approach to area studies which holds theoretical generalisability together with spatial and historical particularity. Robert Bates, a comparativist and area specialist known as a critic of ‘area studies’, similarly put forward the idea that appropriately scientific methods must be employed to create ‘analytic narratives’ (Bates, 1998). Taking as given that forecasts of complex systems within specific temporal and spatial frameworks are imperfect and open to criticism and debate, social scientists working within the theoretical frames of their disciplines, with their partial predictive capacities, might best combine such approaches with more interpretivist understandings of the country with which they are dealing. Although there is some truth in the scenarists’ claim that so far as future-oriented research is concerned ‘getting it right’ is not the only consideration, single-future forecasts applying country-specific knowledge to theoretical insights offer an appropriate path forward which will at least eventually reveal *whether* they got it right.

## Appendix One

Source	Time scale	Key drivers		
		Political	Socio-Economic	Security
Yergin & Gustafson, 1993	To 2010	<p>Key political figures – President (Yeltsin) and future president (Chernomyrdin, Zhirinovskii, Rutskoi, Yavlinskii, Rybkin), parliament, local political machines political parties, elite opinion.</p> <p>Political constraints – lack of democratic institutions and democrats, legal nihilism, institutional uncertainty.</p> <p>Money is the new source of power – big industry, the new private sector.</p> <p>Socio-economic constraints – lack of market, no middle-class or civil society, welfare burden, housing.</p>	<p>Mass unemployment is ‘the greatest potential cause of chaos’.</p> <p>Public opinion.</p>	<p>Civil-military relations.</p> <p>Mafia.</p> <p>The military and security police.</p>
European Commission Forward Studies Unit, 1998	2000  ‘and beyond’	<p>The political setting (type of government).</p> <p>Lack of democratic élite – questionable whether most of the élite and general</p>	<p>Mind-set and social climate – ‘fast enrichment, rampant capitalism’, lack of business ethics, ‘general atmosphere of fear’,</p>	<p>The armed forces and enforcement agencies.</p>



		<p>population is democratically minded.</p> <p>Population apathetic and alienated with regard to politics.</p> <p>Economic development and social stability.</p>	<p>‘national humiliation and pride’.</p> <p>Generational change.</p> <p>The cohesion of Russian society, inter-ethnic tension.</p> <p>Centre-region relations.</p>	
Hanson & Sutherland, 1995	‘next 3 years or so’	<p>‘Government’s competence and honour.’</p> <p>Clarity over the constitution, particularly re. regions.</p> <p>Outcome of elections.</p>	<p>Success or failure of macro-stabilisation.</p> <p>Grass-roots evolution of market institutions.</p>	Chechnya and its containment or otherwise.
Galeotti & Synge, 2001	2005	Putin’s ability to forge consensus.	Regions.	Chechnya.
Oliker, Charlick-Paley, & Rand Corporation., 2002	From 2002-to 2015	<p>Failed, or failing, state.</p> <p>Functionality of economic system.</p> <p>Corruption.</p>	Demographic trajectory.	<p>Privatised institutions for personal security.</p> <p>Disaffected military. Increasing regional autonomy, and ethnic or regional conflict.</p> <p>Organised crime.</p>
Satarov et al., 2005	To 2008	<p>Changes affecting ruling group – early resignation of the government, split, change in ratings, expropriation of substantial property from the ruling group, success of ‘operation successor’, changing loyalty of the</p>	<p>Change in the price of oil and gas.</p> <p>Social unrest on the part of the urban poor.</p> <p>Dominant political orientation of the urban</p>	<p>Control over the situation in the regions by the regional authorities.</p> <p>Changes in the zone of instability in the Caucasus.</p>

		<p>federal and/or regional élite.</p> <p>Governability of the country by the bureaucratic machine.</p> <p>Political activity of the young.</p> <p>Structure of opposition.</p>	<p>poor.</p> <p>Dominant mood of the middle classes.</p>	<p>Terrorist activity in Russia.</p>
Kuusi et al., 2007	2017	<p>Growing dissatisfaction of new generation with regime.</p> <p>Growth of authoritarian values and values that idealise power.</p> <p>Energy sector – capacity to innovate and export.</p>	<p>Diversity of the economy.</p> <p>Social development and mood of the middle class.</p> <p>Demographic problems.</p>	<p>Ethnic tension, especially Chechnya.</p>
Kuusi, Smith, Tiihonen, & Finland. Eduskunta, 2010	2030	<p>The rule of law.</p>	<p>Modernisation of economy – corruption, demography, and ‘contradictory attitude to English’.</p> <p>Social development and mood of the middle class.</p>	

Kuchins, 2007	2017	<p>Political system and leadership – ‘the role of individuals and their personalities, backgrounds and predelictions matters a great deal in Russia’.</p> <p>‘Middle class that is increasingly composed of state bureaucrats will undermine development of a more plural political system’.</p> <p>Political stability.</p>	<p>Economic growth.</p> <p>‘The price of oil is the most powerful driver of Russia’s future for the next 10 years’.</p> <p>Role of state corporations.</p> <p>Demography, health, and social issues.</p>	<p>Military modernisation.</p> <p>Arms exports a continuing priority.</p>
Mendelson, 2007	2017	Policy failure.	Corruption.	
Melville & Timofeev, 2008	2020	The authoritarian-democratic dichotomy.	Modernisation.	Russia’s territorial structure.
H. Smith et al., 2008	‘near future’	<p>Role of the ‘securocracy’ in domestic debate.</p> <p>Electoral manipulation.</p> <p>Relationship between ‘securocracy’ and nationalists.</p>	Price of oil.	<p>Projection of military power.</p> <p>Terrorism.</p> <p>Military build-up.</p>
Saradzhyan & Abdullaev, 2011	2012ff	Success of managed succession.	<p>Deep economic crisis.</p> <p>Oil dependence.</p>	<p>Power of security agencies.</p> <p>Terrorism.</p>

		<p>Change in popularity of ruling regime.</p> <p>Radicalisation of opposition and/or electorate.</p>	<p>Corruption.</p> <p>Socio-economic disparity.</p> <p>Rise of internet-based social activism.</p> <p>Demography – shrinking workforce.</p>	<p>Rise of ultra-nationalism.</p> <p>Massive infrastructure failure or natural disaster.</p>
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**Table One. Bell's Typology of Explanatory Methodologies for the Study of Soviet Behaviour (1958)**

Group	Sub-Group	Explanation	Associated analysts
characterological theories	anthropological	The importance of cultural influences and norms of behaviour, leading to generalisations about, for example, Russians' preference for strong authority.	Dicks, 1952; Gorer & Rickman, 1949; Mead, 1951; Tomasic, 1953.
	psychoanalytic	Study of 'Bolshevik' character, particularly the leadership, leading to conclusions of 'rigid, suspicious, unyielding, ever-aggressive' characteristics caused by 'fears of death and latent homosexual impulses'.	Leites, 1953.
sociological theories	social system	Identification of functional characteristics of the Soviet system, for example, over-mobilisation of resources to one particular objective. In this way it was intended to locate the points of systemic strain.	Bauer, 1956.
	ideal types	Analysing how Soviet society adhered to Barrington Moore's 'ideal types' of social organisation (traditional, rational-technical, political) in order to provide insight into future choices.	Moore, 1950, 1952, 1954.
political theories	Marxist	A Marxist interpretation of the path history would take, emphasising the influence of the workers and of productive power as causes of and constraints on development.	Deutscher, 1953.
	neo-Marxist	Identifying the Soviet Union as a 'bureaucratic collective', but in terms of predictive stance, similar to the Marxist position.	Hilferding, 1947.
	totalitarian	No essential change in the nature of the regime	Wolfe, 1957.

		was possible, and so continued confrontation with the West expected.	
	Kremlinological	Looking out for power struggles and interpreting signs, for example, who stands next to whom at ceremonies, in order to glean information about the closed group which ruled the Soviet Union.	Western foreign ministries and journalists.
historical theories	Slavic institutions	Arguing that Soviet behaviour was shaped by traditional Slavic character and institutions, for example, that all Russian regimes have been sudden and arbitrary. Since these traditions were so deeply rooted they would remain for the foreseeable future.	Crankshaw, 1951.
	geo-political	Strategic interests are derived from the Soviet Union's position as a great land-mass power.	Kennan, 1954.

*Source:* Developed from Bell, D. (1958) 'Ten Theories in Search of Reality, The Prediction of Soviet Behaviour in the Social Sciences', *World Politics*, 10(3), 327-65

## CONTINUITY

Muddling down' (Yergin and Gustafson, 1993)  
'Muddling Through' (European Commission Forward Studies Unit, 1998)  
'Inert Russia' (Satarov et al 2005)  
'Putin Redux' (Mendelson, 2007)  
'Kremlin Gambit' (Russia 2020)  
Putinism without Putin (Kuchins 2007)  
Medvedev Stays (Saradzhyan and Abdullaev, 2011)

## BEST CASE

'Chudo' (Yergin and Gustafson, 1993)  
'Gradual Democratisation' ((European Commission Forward Studies Unit 1998)  
Smart Russia (Satarov et al 2005)  
Russia of Contracts (Kuusi et al. 2010)  
Putinism Falls (Kuchins 2007)  
Flip Back West (Mendelson 2007)  
New Dream (Melville & Timofeev, 2008)

Influential  
Global  
Player  
(Kuusi et al.  
2007)

Two-Headed Eagle  
(Yergin & Gustafson,  
1993)  
Benign  
Authoritarianism  
((European  
Commission Forward  
Studies Unit 1998)

Mosaic Russia  
(Kuusi et al.  
2007)  
Russian Mosaic  
(Melville &  
Timofeev, 2008)

Regional  
Divergence  
(Hanson &  
Sutherland  
1995)

Time of Troubles  
(Yergin & Gustafson,  
1993)

Weak Centre ((European  
Commission Forward Studies Unit  
1998)

## WORST CASE

Malign Authoritarianism ((European  
Commission Forward Studies Unit 1998)  
Renewed Authoritarianism (Hanson &  
Sutherland 1995)  
Okhrana dictatorship (Satarov et al 2005)  
Power Élites Russia (Kuusi et al. 2007)  
A Shot in the Dark (Kuchins 2007)  
Chekists Unchecked (Mendelson 2007)  
Fortress Russia (Melville & Timofeev, 2008)  
President X (Saradzhyan and Abdullaev, 2011)

## REGIONS